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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 001307

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SUBJECT: TSVANGIRAI DISCUSSES ZIMBABWE'S CHALLENGES WITH
STAFFDEL

REF: A) HARARE 1219 B) HARARE 1151

Classified By: political section chief Matt Harrington.
Reasons: 1.5 (B) and (D).

Summary

¶1. (C) MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai told a visiting staffdel that the MDC was pursuing its legal challenge of the election result, had embarked on a campaign to sensitize African governments to the situation in Zimbabwe, and welcomed dialogue with ZANU-PF, so long as the ruling party did not insist on preconditions. He gave the impression that organized mass action remained likely but was not imminent. The MDC leader advocated the formation of a bipartisan national committee, perhaps based in Parliament, to ensure fair distribution of food assistance. His delegation cautioned the West to handle the NEPAD/Zimbabwe linkage very carefully -- some in the region believe Mbeki's advocacy of this initiative is a sign that he has sold out to the West. Excluding Zimbabwe from NEPAD, therefore, could ironically strengthen Mugabe's hand with key players on the continent.
End Summary.

¶2. (U) HIRC staff members Malik Chaka and Pearl Alice Marsh, accompanied by the Ambassador and political section chief, met on May 29 with Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) leader Morgan Tsvangirai. Tsvangirai was joined by MDC Members of Parliament Priscilla Misihairabwi and Trudy Stevenson, and special advisor Gandi Mudzingwa.

MDC's Next steps

¶3. (C) Tsvangirai noted that the staffdel was visiting Zimbabwe at a time of deepening political, social, and economic crisis. The current regime's lack of political legitimacy was exacerbating the country's other difficulties, including food shortages, a worsening economy, and a collapsing health sector. The MDC, he continued, has decided to proceed along several fronts. First, the party had filed a legal challenge of the election results, although it recognized that the judiciary has been subverted. Second, it had embarked on an active diplomatic campaign to sensitize African governments to the deteriorating situation in Zimbabwe. Third, the party had welcomed the initiative by Presidents Mbeki and Obasanjo to bring the MDC and ZANU-PF together in a formal dialogue. Tsvangirai expressed his view that dialogue is the best option for finding a constructive way forward, but said the ruling party was now trying to impose all sorts of preconditions for resumption of the talks, long after the agenda had been agreed on. Without elaborating, he noted that Nigerian Foreign Minister Lamido was in town trying to reconvene this process (Note: Tsvangirai's advisor Gandi Mudzingwa later told us that

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Lamido had advised the MDC he was working to convince Mugabe to rejoin the talks. End Note.)

¶4. (C) The MDC leader said there has been significant pressure on the party leadership to craft a firm response to the stolen election, as Zimbabweans are angry and do not accept the status quo. The party has had to work very hard to restrain the public reaction, as the GOZ response to demonstrations would certainly be brutal and bloody. Tsvangirai mentioned three crises that need to be addressed

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urgently. First, the food shortage could lead to a "catastrophic situation," and a bipartisan national committee ought to be established to devise an effective solution. In addition, the rapid shutting down of companies was causing a commensurate -- and alarming -- rise in unemployment and poverty rates, and an effective policy must be implemented on the AIDS pandemic, a national disaster that government had not demonstrated the political will to address.

MDC's Africa diplomacy

15. (C) Noting the MDC's attempts to build African support, Marsh asked whether the West had misplayed its hand by too strongly criticizing Mugabe and his policies in advance of the election. Not at all, Tsvangirai replied. Africa, he said, must live up to international human rights norms, and cannot continue to insist that it be judged by lower standards if it expects the world's respect. Asked the MDC's objectives in lobbying African nations, Tsvangirai said the party's approach was to recognize the injustices of the colonial past and the contributions made by the liberation generation. At the same time, it is pointing out that, instead of contributing to Zimbabwe's prosperity, this country's liberation generation is employing organized violence to suppress the population. Africa, he said, is at a stage where it must deal with both sides of the political divide, and that is how tolerance and democratic values are nurtured. The MDC wants an election rerun "at some point," but wants to secure agreement on a transitional mechanism in the meantime.

Transitional mechanism

16. (C) Chaka inquired what a transitional mechanism would look like, and wondered how the MDC would maintain its independence while participating in such an arrangement. The MDC, Tsvangirai replied, would not follow (former ZAPU leader) Joshua Nkomo's example and allow itself to be co-opted. The transitional mechanism (which might include a 50-50 sharing of Cabinet posts) should be tasked with laying the groundwork for a new election, and should oversee implementation of confidence-building measures such as disbanding of the militias and de-politicization of the police.

Internal ZANU-PF dynamics

17. (C) Chaka expressed surprise that no one in ZANU-PF had been willing to confront Mugabe about the damaging consequences of his policies. There are two primary groups in the ruling party, Tsvangirai replied, the hardliners and the reformers, and Mugabe believes he can control the destiny of Zimbabwe using the hardliners, the most prominent of whom is Speaker of Parliament and heir apparent Emmerson Mnangagwa. There are many in the ruling party who are unhappy with the direction of the country, but they feel vulnerable because Mugabe has, over the years, evolved from a quasi-democrat to benign dictator to brutal dictator.

Food crisis

18. (C) Marsh asked what kind of national body Tsvangirai envisioned for dealing with the looming food shortages. War veterans nationwide, he replied, are taking over food distribution efforts and are denying MDC supporters access. A bipartisan committee, perhaps based in Parliament, would ensure that food is distributed to all who need it, regardless of political affiliation. The Ambassador noted that he had urged the United Nations to establish an independent mechanism to monitor food deliveries, and that we and other donors would likely support such a body. He informed Tsvangirai that the USG would be announcing that it had been forced to divert to Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique 10,000 metric tons of yellow maize intended for Zimbabwe because the GOZ had refused to grant an exemption to its own restrictions on grain with Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO).

Mass action

19. (C) Chaka said he had read recent press reports quoting Tsvangirai's vows to organize mass action. What precisely

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does the MDC leader mean by mass action, and are there large numbers of Zimbabweans prepared to participate in it, particularly in light of the failed stayaway shortly after the election? That stayaway had failed, Tsvangirai said, because it was organized by the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions as a protest of labor conditions, not a demonstration of unhappiness with the country's broader political crisis. There is no question of numbers or capacity to organize, as mass action will happen. People's anger is deep, and they are not prepared to countenance another six years of rule by President Mugabe. The MDC, however, has not yet decided what form it will take.

NEPAD and the West's approach

110. (C) Marsh asked what the West could do to help

extricate Zimbabwe from its current plight. The West's approach has been constructive, Tsvangirai said, as the efforts to isolate the GOZ leadership are having an effect, if not on Mugabe at least on those around him. He urged the international community to continue to pressure and isolate the Zimbabwean president, and to try to find a dignified exit for him. MP Trudy Stevenson added that it would be useful if the G-8 makes it clear at the upcoming summit that the continent's approach to Zimbabwe will affect the success of NEPAD. Yes, Tsvangirai agreed, there is no way that Zimbabwe can be walled off from the benefits of NEPAD, as if it's an island. If they are to have any credibility, African governments must be able to demonstrate that they can police themselves effectively. MP Priscilla Misihairabwi warned that the West must be very careful in how it handles the NEPAD/Zimbabwe linkage. Some in the region, she said, are deeply suspicious of NEPAD and believe the initiative indicates Mbeki has sold out to the West, so excluding Zimbabwe could very well strengthen Mugabe's hand in his attempts to portray himself as the preeminent defender of the continent's interests. The Ambassador pointed out that, although he expected positive statements to be made about NEPAD at the G-8 meeting, no checks would be written, and there will be plenty of opportunities to shape NEPAD down the road.

Continuing Harassment

¶11. (C) The Ambassador asked Tsvangirai to comment on press reports that police had raided his rural home the night of May 26. According to the MDC leader, a group of heavily armed police had entered his home without a warrant in Buhera, Manicaland province, saying they were searching for arms of war. They beat up one of the home's caretakers and proceeded to arrest 13 MDC supporters in the vicinity, even though they had not committed any apparent crime. Tsvangirai expressed relief that his mother, who lives in the house, had been elsewhere at the time.

Comment

¶12. (C) Tsvangirai was upbeat but did not present a particularly focused picture of his party's plans in the near-term. In fact, he concentrated more on describing the range of challenges facing Zimbabwe than on proposing achievable cures. Such vagueness likely derives from the reality that there is not agreement among senior members of the party about the way forward. Tsvangirai's failure in his introductory remarks to mention mass action likely indicates that such a step has been put on the back burner for now.

SULLIVAN